

## ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

NORTH AMERICAN BIRDS OF PREY. By Alexander Sprunt, Jr. Based upon and supplementary to "The Hawks of North America," by John Bichard May. Published under the sponsorship of the National Audubon Society by Harper & Brothers, New York, 1955: 6½ × 9½ in., 227 pp., 47 plates (43 in color) by Allan Brooks and others. \$5.00.

Serious ornithologists should be grateful that popular interest in birds has increased to the point that American publishers now feel that it is worth their while to publish an average of one new bird book a week. Many fine ornithological works have been produced in recent years, and some of these have been outstanding financial successes. An unfortunate corollary to this spate of bird books lies in the temptation, to which publishers submit all too often, to jump on the band wagon with an ill-conceived, hastily produced volume, on the assumption that *anything* about birds will sell these days.

Neither the publisher nor the National Audubon Society has gained stature by the publication of the latest of Alexander Sprunt's scissors-and-paste jobs (see J. C. Dickinson's review of "Florida Bird Life," *Wilson Bull.*, 67, 1955:146-147). Once more a work widely regarded as a classic of its kind, in this case May's "Hawks of North America," published in 1935, has been replaced by a patchwork volume which is an insult to the original book.

To take up the illustrations first: all but one (European Merlin and Kestrel) of the original Brooks color plates have been reprinted, but the reproduction is mediocre, about one-third of the plates in my copy being badly out of register. Since the present volume, unlike the 1935 edition, includes the owls, colored illustrations of owls have been rounded up from a variety of sources to be reused. Four artists (Brooks, Fuertes, Horsfall and Weber) are represented among the owl plates. Although all but two species of the diurnal birds of prey are figured in color, only 10 of the 18 included species of owls are so favored.

The text, following a foreword by Roger Tory Peterson and a general introduction by the author, is organized into 10 chapters; one for the owls and one each for nine more-or-less natural subdivisions of the Falconiformes, as originally used by May. Each chapter is introduced by a short general discussion, largely paraphrased from May. The individual species and subspecies accounts begin with the English and scientific names, with a translation of the latter. Then comes a list of "local names," usually an abridgment of May's similar list. A paragraph entitled "Recognition" follows: this is again usually a paraphrased and abridged version of May's "Description" (a more accurate term, since field marks are seldom pointed out as such). No particular purpose seems to have been achieved by thus changing the original wording, and the abridgment has sometimes been detrimental; thus, nowhere in Sprunt's text is the dusky head-color of immature Turkey Vultures mentioned.

Next comes a paragraph entitled "Nesting." This is an addition to the original May material. The descriptions of nests and eggs appear to be adapted from those of Bent (1937-38. *U.S. Nat. Mus. Bull.* 167, 170), although no source is specified except for occasional direct quotations. A summary of the range follows; the useful little maps which appeared in May's book are not reprinted.

After these introductory paragraphs, the general discussion of the species (entitled "History") is presented. It is the avowed intention of the author to shift May's strong emphasis on food habits toward a more general description of the ecology of each

hawk or owl. The very detailed food analyses of the 1935 book are thus either briefly summarized or largely omitted. Much of the remainder of the text is a rehash of Bent and other standard authorities; little or no attempt seems to have been made to utilize the abundant recent literature on the birds of prey. Other than the author's own publications, only two works subsequent to Bent (1937-1938) are listed in the bibliography: Arnold on the Golden Eagle (*U.S. Fish and Wildlife Serv. Circ. no. 27, 1954*) and Koford on the California Condor (*Nat. Audubon Soc. Research Rept. no. 4, 1953*). There is a strong subjective vein running through the book, the author's own field experiences receiving a rather disproportionate amount of space considering the small number of pages available for each species. This is carried to an extreme in the case of the Rough-legged Hawk, a species for which much authentic life history material is available. One of the three pages allotted to the "history" of this species is devoted to a fantastic hearsay story of a supposed nesting of the Rough-legged Hawk at Lake Okeechobee, Florida, a story which Sprunt admits he has already told in print on two previous occasions!

The most inexcusable aspect of this book is the obvious haste and carelessness with which it was thrown together. The classification and nomenclature are roughly those of the A.O.U. Check-list as amended through 1954, but with dozens of errors. One species and eight subspecies accepted by the A.O.U. prior to 1954 are omitted, while five subspecies no longer admitted to the Check-list are included by Sprunt. A half-hearted attempt was apparently made to conform to purely nomenclatorial changes instituted since the 1931 Check-list, but the amount of care given to this task may be judged by the fact that the two subspecies of Elf Owl are assigned to separate generic names. The paragraphs on *Otus trichopsis* and *Otus flammeolus* appear in the middle of the list of subspecies of *Otus asio*. Typographical errors abound, especially in scientific names: *cathartes* for *Cathartes*, *fuertsi* for *fuertesii* (twice), *Haliaetos* (twice) and *Haliaetus* for *Haliaeetus*, *Asiootus* for *Asio otus*, etc. Baja California is variously rendered as Lower California, lower California, and Baja, California (the latter twice on one page). Two subspecies of *Strix occidentalis* are transferred to *S. varia*. Little attention is paid to gender within scientific names; thus, we have *Aegolius acadicus* but *Aegolius acadica brooksi* and *Aegolius funerea magnus*. The statement is made that "the Dwarf Horned Owl is not included here since it inhabits the southern part of Lower California and is not to be seen in this country," yet full treatment is allotted to one full species and three additional subspecies whose ranges are also confined to Baja California. The paragraph from which the above statement is quoted also contains a misspelled subspecific name and a verbless sentence. The list is interminable.

The book closes with a convenient summary, by Kenneth D. Morrison, of state and provincial laws relating to bird protection. There is no index.

Most book reviews end with some such sentence as "The minor errors cited above in no way detract from the general high quality of the work." Such a statement cannot be made about "North American Birds of Prey," especially when we have May's classic "Hawks of North America" as a standard of comparison. Fortunate, indeed, are those of us who bought the 1935 edition at the fantastically low original price of \$1.25. Today's buyer of bird books would be well advised to ignore the Sprunt book completely, and apply the \$5.00 price toward the eventual purchase of a set of Bent's "Life Histories."—KENNETH C. PARKES.